

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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MR. SCARBOROUGH'S FAMILY.

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CHAPTER XXIII. THE RUMOURS AS TO MR. PROSPER.

It was still October when Harry Annesley went down to Buston, and the Mountjoys had just reached Brussels. Mr. Grey had made his visit to Tretton and had returned to London. Harry went home on an understanding—on the part of his mother at any rate—that he should remain there till Christmas. But he felt himself very averse to so long a sojourn. If the Hall and park were open to him he might endure it. He would take down two or three stiff books which he certainly would never read, and would shoot a few pheasants, and possibly ride one of his future brother-in-law's horses with the hounds. But he feared that there was to be a quarrel by which he would be debarred from the Hall and the park; and he knew too that it would not be well for him to shoot and hunt when his income should have been cut off. It would be necessary that some great step should be taken at once; but then it would be necessary also that Florence should agree to that step. He had a modest lodging in London, but before he started he prepared himself for what must occur by giving notice. "I don't say as yet that I shall give them up; but I might as well let you know that it's possible." This he said to Mrs. Brown who kept the lodgings, and who received this intimation as Mrs. Brown is sure to do. But where should he betake himself when his home at Mrs. Brown's had been lost? He would, he thought, find it quite impossible to live in absolute idleness at the rectory. Then in an unhappy frame of mind he went down by the train to Stevenage,

and was there met by the rectory pony-carriage.

He saw it all in his mother's eye the moment she embraced him. There was some terrible trouble in the wind, and what could it be but his uncle? "Well, mother, what is it?"

"Oh, Harry, there is such a sad affair up at the Hall."

"Is my uncle dead?"

"Dead; no!"

"Then why do you look so sad?"

"Even such a man, so faint, so spiritless, So dull, so dead in look, so woe-begone, Drew Priam's curtain in the dead of night."

"Oh, Harry, do not laugh. Your uncle says such dreadful things."

"I don't care much what he says. The question is—what does he mean to do?"

"He declares that he will cut you off altogether."

"That is sooner said than done."

"That is all very well, Harry; but he can do it. Oh, Harry! But come and sit down and talk to me. I told your father to be out, so that I might have you alone. And the dear girls are gone into Buntingford."

"Ah, like them. Thoroughbury will have enough of them."

"He is our only happiness now."

"Poor Thoroughbury! I pity him if he has to do happiness for the whole household."

"Joshua is a most excellent young man. Where we should be without him I do not know." The flourishing young brewer was named Joshua, and had been known to Harry for some years, though never as yet known as a brother-in-law.

"I am sure he is; particularly as he has chosen Molly to be his wife. He is just the young man who ought to have a wife."

"Of course he ought."

"Because he can keep a family. But now about my uncle. He is to perform this ceremony of cutting me off. Will he turn out to have had a wife and family in former ages? I have no doubt old Scarborough could manage it, but I don't give my uncle credit for so much cleverness."

"But in future ages," said the unhappy mother, shaking her head and rubbing her eyes.

"You mean that he is going to have a family?"

"It is all in the hands of Providence," said the parson's wife.

"Yes; that is true. He is not too old yet to be a second Priam, and have his curtains drawn the other way. That's his little game, is it?"

"There's a sort of rumour about, that it is possible."

"And who is the lady?"

"You may be sure there will be no lack of a lady if he sets his mind upon it. I was turning it over in my mind, and I thought of Matilda Thoroughbury."

"Joshua's aunt!"

"Well; she is Joshua's aunt, no doubt. I did just whisper the idea to Joshua, and he says that she is fool enough for anything. She has twenty-five thousand pounds of her own, but she lives all by herself."

"I know where she lives—just out of Buntingford, as you go to Royston. But she's not alone. Is Uncle Prosper to marry Miss Tickle also?" Miss Tickle was an estimable lady living as companion to Miss Thoroughbury.

"I don't know how they may manage; but it has to be thought of, Harry. We only know that your uncle has been twice to Buntingford."

"The lady is fifty, at any rate."

"The lady is barely forty. She gives out that she is thirty-six. And he could settle a jointure on her which would leave the property not worth having."

"What can I do?"

"Yes, indeed, my dear; what can you do?"

"Why is he going to upset all the arrangements of my life, and his life, after such a fashion as this?"

"That's just what your father says."

"I suppose he can do it. The law will allow him. But the injustice would be monstrous! I did not ask him to take me by the hand when I was a boy and lead me into this special walk of life. It has been his own doing. How will he look me

in the face and tell me that he is going to marry a wife? I shall look him in the face and tell him of my wife."

"But is that settled?"

"Yes, mother; it is settled. Wish me joy for having won the finest lady that ever walked the earth." His mother blessed him, but said nothing about the finest lady—who at that moment she believed to be the future bride of Mr. Joshua Thoroughbury. "And when I shall tell my uncle that it is so, what will he say to me? Will he have the face then to tell me that I am to be cut out of Buston? I doubt whether he will have the courage?"

"He has thought of that, Harry."

"How thought of it, mother?"

"He has given orders that he is not to see you."

"Not to see me!"

"So he declares. He has written a long letter to your father, in which he says that he would be spared the agony of an interview."

"What! is it all done then?"

"Your father got the letter yesterday. It must have taken my poor brother a week to write it."

"And he tells the whole plan; Matilda Thoroughbury, and the future family?"

"No; he does not say anything about Miss Thoroughbury. He says that he must make other arrangements about the property."

"He can't make other arrangements; that is, not until the boy is born. It may be a long time first, you know."

"But the jointure."

"What does Molly say about it?"

"Molly is mad about it, and so is Joshua."

Joshua talks about it just as though he were one of us, and he says that the old people at Buntingford would not hear of it." The old people spoken of were the father and mother of Joshua, and the half-brother of Miss Matilda Thoroughbury.

"But what can they do?"

"They can do nothing. If Miss Matilda likes Uncle Prosper—"

"Likes, my dear! How young you are! Of course she would like a country house to live in, and the park, and the county society. And she would like somebody to live with besides Miss Tickle."

"My uncle, for instance."

"Yes, your uncle."

"If I had my choice, mother, I should prefer Miss Tickle."

"Because you are a silly boy. But what are you to do now?"

"In this long letter which he has written to my father, does he give no reason?"

"Your father will show you the letter. Of course he gives reasons. He says that you have done something which you ought not to have done—about that wretched Mountjoy Scarborough."

"What does he know about it—the idiot!"

"Oh, Harry!"

"Well, mother, what better can I say of him? He has taken me as a child and fashioned my life for me; has said that this property should be mine, and has put an income into my hand as though I were an eldest son; has repeatedly declared, when his voice was more potent than mine, that I should follow no profession. He has bound himself to me, telling all the world that I was his heir. And now he casts me out because he has heard some cock-and-bull story, of the truth of which he knows nothing. What better can I say of him than call him an idiot? He must be that or else a heartless knave. And he says that he does not mean to see me—me with whose life he has thus been empowered to interfere, so as to blast it if not to bless it, and intends to turn me adrift as he might do a dog that did not suit him! And because he knows that he cannot answer me, he declares that he will not see me."

"It is very hard, Harry."

"Therefore I call him an idiot in preference to calling him a knave. But I am not going to be dropped out of the running in that way, just in deference to his will. I shall see him. Unless they lock him up in his bedroom I shall compel him to see me!"

"What good would that do, Harry? That would only set him more against you."

"You don't know his weakness."

"Oh yes, I do; he is very weak."

"He will not see me, because he will have to yield when he hears what I have to say for myself. He knows that, and would therefore fain keep away from me. Why should he be stirred to this animosity against me?"

"Why indeed?"

"Because there is someone who wishes to injure me, more strong than he is, and who has got hold of him. Someone has lied behind my back."

"Who has done this?"

"Ah, that is the question. But I know who has done it, though I will not name

him just now. This enemy of mine, knowing him to be weak—knowing him to be an idiot, has got hold of him and persuaded him. He believes the story which is told to him, and then feels happy in shaking off an incubus. No doubt I have not been very soft with him—nor, indeed, hard. I have kept out of his way, and he is willing to resent it. But he is afraid to face me and tell me that it is so. Here are the girls come back from Buntingford. Molly, you blooming young bride, I wish you joy of your brewer."

"He's none the worse on that account, Master Harry," said the eldest sister.

"All the better—very much the better. Where would you be if he was not a brewer? But I congratulate you with all my heart, old girl. I have known him ever so long, and he's one of the best fellows I do know."

"Thank you, Harry," and she kissed him.

"I wish Fanny and Kate may even do so well."

"All in good time," said Fanny.

"I mean to have a banker—all to myself," said Kate.

"I wish you may have half as good a man for your husband," said Harry.

"And I am to tell you," continued Molly, who was now in high good-humour, "that there will be always one of his horses for you to ride as long as you remain at home. It is not every brother-in-law that would do as much as that for you."

"Nor yet every uncle," said Kate, shaking her head, from which Harry could see that this quarrel with his uncle had been freely discussed in the family circle.

"Uncles are very different," said the mother; "uncles can't be expected to do everything as though they were in love."

"Fancy Uncle Peter in love," said Kate. Mr. Prosper was called Uncle Peter by the girls, though always in a sort of joke. Then the other two girls shook their heads very gravely, from which Harry learned that the question respecting the choice of Miss Matilda Thoroughbury as a mistress for the Hall had been discussed also before them.

"I am not going to marry all the family," said Molly.

"Not Miss Matilda, for instance," said her brother, laughing.

"No, especially not Matilda. Joshua is quite as angry about his aunt as anybody here can be. You'll find that he is more of an Annesley than a Thoroughbury."

"My dear," said the mother, "your

husband will, as a matter of course, think most of his own family. And so ought you to do of his family, which will be yours. A married woman should always think most of her husband's family." In this way the mother told her daughter of her future duties; but behind the mother's back Kate made a grimace, for the benefit of her sister Fanny, showing thereby her conviction that in a matter of blood—what she called being a gentleman—a Thorough-bury could not approach an Annesley.

"Mamma does not know it as yet," Molly said afterwards in privacy to her brother, "but you may take it for granted that Uncle Peter has been into Buntingford and has made an offer to Aunt Matilda. I could tell it at once, because she looked so sharp at me to-day. And Joshua says that he is sure it is so by the airs she gives herself."

"You think she'll have him?"

"Have him? Of course she'll have him. Why shouldn't she? A wretched old maid living with a companion like that would have anyone."

"She has got a lot of money."

"She'll take care of her money, let her alone for that. And she'll have his house to live in. And there'll be a jointure. Of course if there were to be children——"

"Oh, bother!"

"Well, perhaps there will not. But it will be just as bad. We don't mean even to visit them; we think it so very wicked. And we shall tell them a bit of our mind as soon as the thing has been publicly declared."

CHAPTER XXIV. HARRY ANNESLEY'S MISERY.

THE conversation which took place that evening between Harry and his father was more serious in its language, though not more important in its purpose. "This is bad news, Harry," said the rector.

"Yes, indeed, sir."

"Your uncle, no doubt, can do as he pleases."

"You mean as to the income he has allowed me?"

"As to the income! As to the property itself. It is bad waiting for dead men's shoes."

"And yet it is what everybody does in this world. No one can say that I have been at all in a hurry to step into my uncle's shoes. It was he that first told you that he should never marry, and as the property had been entailed on me, he undertook to bring me up as his son."

"So he did."

"Not a doubt about it, sir. But I had nothing to say to it. As far as I understand, he has been allowing me two hundred and fifty pounds a year for the last dozen years."

"Ever since you went to the Charter-house."

"At that time I could not be expected to have a word to say to it. And it has gone on ever since."

"Yes, it has gone on ever since."

"And when I was leaving Cambridge he required that I should not go into a profession."

"Not exactly that, Harry."

"It was so that I understood it. He did not wish his heir to be burdened with a profession. He said so to me himself."

"Yes, just when he was in his pride, because you had got your fellowship. But there was a contract understood, if not made."

"What contract?" asked Harry with an air of surprise.

"That you should be to him as a son."

"I never undertook it. I wouldn't have done it at the price—or for any price. I never felt for him the respect or the love that were due to a father. I did feel both of them, to the full, for my own father. They are a sort of thing which we cannot transfer."

"They may be shared, Harry," said the rector, who was flattered.

"No, sir; in this instance that was not possible."

"You might have sat by while he read a sermon to his sister and nieces. You understood his vanity, and you wounded it, knowing what you were doing. I don't mean to blame you, but it was a misfortune. Now we must look it in the face and see what must be done. Your mother has told you that he has written to me. There is his letter. You will see that he writes with a fixed purpose." Then he handed to Harry a letter written on a large sheet of paper, the reading of which would be so long that Harry seated himself for the operation.

The letter need not here be repeated at length. It was written with involved sentences, but in very decided language. It said nothing of Harry's want of duty, or not attending to the sermons, or of other deficiencies of a like nature, but based his resolution in regard to stopping the income on his nephew's misconduct—as it appeared to him—in a certain particular case. And

unfortunately—though Harry was prepared to deny that his conduct on that occasion had been subject to censure—he could not contradict any of the facts on which Mr. Prosper had founded his opinion. The story was told in reference to Mountjoy Scarborough, but not the whole story. “I understand that there was a row in the streets late at night, at the end of which young Mr. Scarborough was left as dead under the railings.” “Left for dead!” exclaimed Harry. “Who says that he was left for dead? I did not think him to be dead.”

“You had better read it to the end,” said his father, and Harry read it. The letter went on to describe how Mountjoy Scarborough was missed from his usual haunts, how search was made by the police, how the newspapers were filled with the strange incident, and how Harry had told nothing of what had occurred. “But beyond this,” the letter went on to say, “he positively denied, in conversation with the gentleman’s brother, that he had anything to do with the gentleman on the night in question. If this be so, he absolutely lied. A man who would lie on such an occasion, knowing himself to have been guilty of having beaten the man in such a way as to have probably caused his death—for he had left him for dead under the railings in a London street and in the midnight hour—and would positively assert to the gentleman’s brother that he had not seen the gentleman on the night in question, when he had every reason to believe that he had killed him—a deed which might or might not be murder—is not fit to be recognised as my heir.” There were other sentences equally long and equally complicated, in all of which Mr. Prosper strove to tell the story with tragic effect, but all of which had reference to the same transaction. He said nothing as to the ultimate destination of the property, nor of his own proposed marriage. Should he have a son, that son would, of course, have the property. Should there be no son, Harry must have it, even though his conduct might have been ever so abominable. To prevent that outrage on society, his marriage—with its ordinary results—would be the only step. Of that he need say nothing. But the two hundred and fifty pounds would not be paid after the Christmas quarter, and he must decline for the future the honour of receiving Mr. Henry Annesley at the Hall.

Harry, when he had read it all, began

to storm with anger. The man, as he truly observed, had grossly insulted him. Mr. Prosper had called him a liar and had hinted that he was a murderer. “You can do nothing to him,” his father said. “He is your uncle, and you have eaten his bread.”

“I can’t call him out and fight him.”

“You must let it alone.”

“I can make my way into the house and see him.”

“I don’t think you can do that. You will find it difficult to get beyond the front door, and I would advise you to abandon all such ideas. What can you say to him?”

“It is false!”

“What is false? Though in essence it is false, in words it is true. You did deny that you had seen him.”

“I forget what passed. Augustus Scarborough endeavoured to pump me about his brother, and I did not choose to be pumped. As far as I can ascertain now, it is he that is the liar. He saw his brother after the affair with me.”

“Has he denied it?”

“Practically he denies it by asking me the question. He asked me with the ostensible object of finding out what had become of his brother, when he himself knew what had become of him.”

“But you can’t prove it. He positively says that you did deny having seen him on the night in question. I am not speaking of Augustus Scarborough, but of your uncle. What he says is true, and you had better leave him alone. Take other steps for driving the real truth into his brain.”

“What steps can be taken with such a fool?”

“Write your own account of the transaction, so that he shall read it. Let your mother have it. I suppose he will see your mother.”

“And so beg his favour.”

“You need beg for nothing. Or if the marriage comes off—”

“You have heard of the marriage, sir?”

“Yes; I have heard of the marriage. I believe that he contemplates it. Put your statement of what did occur, and of your motives, into the hands of the lady’s friends. He will be sure to read it.”

“What good will that do?”

“No good, but that of making him ashamed of himself. You have got to read the world a little more deeply than you have hitherto done. He thinks that he is quarrelling with you about the affair in London, but it is in truth because you

have declined to hear him read the sermons after having taken his money."

"Then it is he that is the liar rather than I."

"I, who am a moderate man, would say that neither is a liar. You did not choose to be pumped, as you call it, and therefore spoke as you did. According to the world's ways that was fair enough. He, who is sore at the little respect you have paid him, takes any ground of offence rather than that. Being sore at heart he believes anything. This young Scarborough in some way gets hold of him, and makes him accept this cock-and-bull story. If you had sat there punctual all those Sunday evenings, do you think he would have believed it then?"

"And I have got to pay such a penalty as this?" The rector could only shrug his shoulders. He was not disposed to scold his son. It was not the custom of the house that Harry should be scolded. He was a fellow of his college and the heir to Buston, and was therefore considered to be out of the way of scolding. But the rector felt that his son had made his bed and must now lie on it, and Harry was aware that this was his father's feeling.

For two or three days he wandered about the country very down in the mouth. The natural state of ovation in which the girls existed was in itself an injury to him. How could he join them in their ovation, he who had suffered so much? It seemed to be heartless that they should smile and rejoice when he—the head of the family as he had been taught to consider himself—was being so cruelly ill-used. For a day or two he hated Thoroughbury, though Thoroughbury was all that was kind to him. He congratulated him with cold congratulations, and afterwards kept out of his way. "Remember, Harry, that up to Christmas you can always have one of the nags. There's Belladonna and Orange Peel. I think you'd find the mare a little the faster, though perhaps the horse is the bigger jumper." "Oh, thank you," said Harry, and passed on. Now Thoroughbury was fond of his horses, and liked to have them talked about, and he knew that Harry Annesley was treating him badly. But he was a good-humoured fellow, and he bore it without complaint. He did not even say a cross word to Molly. Molly, however, was not so patient. "You might be a little more gracious when he's doing the best he can for you. It is not every one who will lend you a horse to hunt for

two months." Harry shook his head, and wandered away miserable through the fields, and would not in these days even set his foot upon the soil of the park. "He was not going to intrude any further," he said to the rector. "You can come to church at any rate," his father said, "for he certainly will not be there while you are at the parsonage." Oh yes, Harry would go to the church. "I have yet to understand that Mr. Prosper is owner of the church, and the path there from the rectory is at any rate open to the public." For at Buston the church stands on one corner of the park.

This went on for two or three days, during which nothing further was said by the family as to Harry's woes. A letter was sent off to Mrs. Brown, telling her that the lodgings would not be required any longer, and anxious ideas began to crowd themselves on Harry's mind as to his future residence. He thought that he must go back to Cambridge and take his rooms at St. John's, and look for college work. Two fatal years, years of idleness and gaiety, had been passed, but still he thought that it might be possible. What else was there open for him? And then, as he roamed about the fields, his mind naturally ran away to the girl he loved. How would he dare again to look Florence in the face? It was not only the two hundred and fifty pounds per annum that was gone. That would have been a small income on which to marry. And he had never taken the girl's own money into account. He had rather chosen to look forward to the position as squire of Buston, and to take it for granted that it would not be very long before he was called upon to fill the position. He had said not a word to Florence about money, but it was thus that he had regarded the matter. Now the existing squire was going to marry, and the matter could not so be regarded any longer. He saw half-a-dozen little Prosper's occupying half-a-dozen little cradles, and a whole suite of nurseries established at the Hall. The name of Prosper would be fixed at Buston, putting it altogether beyond his reach.

In such circumstances would it not be reasonable that Florence should expect him to authorise her to break their engagement? What was he now but the penniless son of a poor clergyman, with nothing on which to depend but a miserable stipend, which must cease were he to marry? He knew that he ought to give her back her troth. And yet,

as he thought of doing so, he was indignant with her. Was love to come to this? Was her regard for him to be counted as nothing? What right had he to expect that she should be different from any other girl? Then he was more miserable than ever, as he told himself that such would undoubtedly be her conduct. As he walked across the fields, heavy with the mud of a wet October day, there came down a storm of rain which wet him through. Who does not know the sort of sensation which falls upon a man when he feels that even the elements have turned against him, how he buttons up his coat and bids the clouds open themselves upon his devoted bosom?

Blow winds and crack your cheeks! rage, blow,
You cataracts and hurricanes!

It is thus that a man is apt to address the soft rains of heaven when he is becoming wet through in such a frame of mind; and on the present occasion Harry likened himself to Lear. It was to him as though the steeples were to be drenched, and the cocks drowned when he found himself wet through. In this condition he went back to the house, and so bitter to him were the misfortunes of the world that he would hardly condescend to speak while enduring them. But when he had entered the drawing-room his mother greeted him with a letter. It had come by the day mail, and his mother looked into his face piteously as she gave it to him. The letter was from Brussels, and she could guess from whom it had come. It might be a sweetly soft love-letter; but then it might be neither sweet nor soft in the condition of things in which Harry was now placed. He took it and looked at it, but did not dare to open it on the spur of the moment. Without a word he went up to his room, and then tore it asunder. No doubt, he said to himself, it would allude to his miserable stipend and penniless condition. The letter ran as follows:

"DEAREST HARRY,—I think it right to write to you, though mamma does not approve of it. I have told her, however, that in the present circumstances I am bound to do so, and that I should implore you not to answer. Though I must write, there must be no correspondence between us. Rumours have been received here very detrimental to your character." Harry gnashed his teeth as he read this. "Stories are told about your meeting with Captain Scarborough in London, which I know to be only in part true. Mamma

says that because of them I ought to give up my engagement, and my uncle, Sir Magnus, has taken upon himself to advise me to do so. I have told them both that that which is said of you is in part untrue; but whether it be true or whether it be false, I will never give up my engagement, unless you ask me to do so. They tell me that as regards your pecuniary prospects you are ruined. I say that you cannot be ruined as long as you have my income. It will not be much, but it will, I should think, be enough.

"And now you can do as you please. You may be quite sure that I shall be true to you, through ill report and good report. Nothing that mamma can say to me will change me, and certainly nothing from Sir Magnus.

"And now there need not be a word from you if you mean to be true to me. Indeed, I have promised that there shall be no word, and I expect you to keep my promise for me. If you wish to be free of me, then you must write and say so.

"But you won't wish it, and therefore I am yours, always, always, always your own
FLORENCE."

Harry read the letter standing up in the middle of the room, and in half a minute he had torn off his wet coat, and kicked one of his wet boots to the further corner of the room. Then there was a knock at the door, and his mother entered.

"Tell me, Harry, what she says."

He rushed up to his mother all damp and half-shod as he was, and seized her in his arms. "Oh, mother, mother!"

"What is it, dear?"

"Read that, and tell me whether there ever was a finer human being." Mrs. Annesley did read it, and thought that her own daughter Molly was just as fine a creature. Florence was simply doing what any girl of spirit would do. But she saw that her son was as jubilant now as he had been downcast, and she was quite willing to partake of his comfort. "Not write a word to her. Ha, ha! I think I see myself at it."

"But she seems to be in earnest there."

"In earnest! And so am I in earnest. Would it be possible that a fellow should hold his hand and not write? Yes, my girl; I think that I must write a line. I wonder what she would say if I were not to write?"

"I think she means that you should be silent."

"She has taken a very odd way of

assuming it. I am to keep her promise for her. My darling, my angel, my life! But I cannot do that one thing. Oh, mother, mother; if you knew how happy I am. What the mischief does it all signify—Uncle Prosper, Miss Thoroughbury, and the rest of it—with a girl like that?"

IN BONNIE SCOTLAND.

VII.

NEXT morning I get safely on board, just as the bell is ringing for a start, and the men are standing by the big hawsers ready to cast them off. What with passengers and luggage, the hauling of ropes and the shouting of orders, there is a considerable bustle on board, while the sailors call to each other in a very Gaelic kind of English. And highly amused is a pleasant-looking Scotch dame at my side, who softly mimics their peculiar voices, "Ai, yai, ai!" They've a conseed'ra'ble awcsent, these puir Heeland bodies. They've no' the pewre English we hauf in the Lowlands."

The Gillies family have not come on board. They will join the steamer no doubt lower down the river at Greenock—a plan by which they are able to enjoy another hour of slumber. But I should not like to miss this part of the river with its quays and the big ocean steamers alongside. And then the great building yards, where huge steamers seem to be constructed in dozens at a time, appearing in every stage of progress, from the mere embryonic girder with attachments for future ribs, to the great sea-monster all clothed with iron plates and just ready for launching. And from everywhere the mighty resonant din of hammers—such a hammering as perhaps never till this time was ever heard on the earth's surface, to which Thor and Tubal Cain and the mythic hammermen of old might listen in wonder and amazement.

Through all this, and stopping here and there at riverside piers, the big steamer makes its cautious way, whistling a good deal and going at half-speed, among ships and tugs and steam-ferries. The banks are often pleasant and park-like, and when the river widens out and blue hills appear in the horizon, the scenery becomes really interesting.

Between wooded banks, with fertile country stretching to the foot of the hills, with the white vapour of passing trains

curling afar off, the steamer, putting on full speed, passes all too quickly, and presently the bluff height of Dumbuck appears on the right, and then, with a good deal of smoke lying in the valley between, the rock and castle of Dumbarton. The town appears from behind the rock—a sturdy double-headed rock, with green terraces and ivied walls, and amiable-looking cannon peering out, and here and there the red or white jacket of a soldier.

By this time we are nearing Greenock, and I am looking forward to our arrival, with the prospect of meeting my fellow-travellers, and to our departure, when they tell me breakfast will be served. Most people would rather hail their departure than arrival at Greenock, which is—in all charity be it said—a detestable-looking spot. But there is a fine on-rush of passengers as we lay up alongside the pier. The Gillies are there, almost at the head of the procession, with Mary Grant, as I discover with a slight additional glance, and a reinforcement from Euston Square—more London tourists, with a great following in the way of boxes and portmanteaux, but these almost overpowered by a sturdy detachment of country people on their way to some local gathering. Then there is another pier to call at, with other London passengers—from St. Pancras this time. But a few hundred passengers more or less seems to make little difference in the big steamer.

If Greenock itself is uninviting, the river makes up for it, spreading out into a fine estuary, land-locked and lake-like, with a border of lofty mountains to the west. It is a pity to leave it for breakfast below, but then a Scotch breakfast is also inviting.

Uncle Jock has met with some City friends—a facetious man from Mark Lane, with a sensible and resolute wife, and another from the Stock Exchange, a quiet sallow man, with a plump, amiable, but intensely sleepy wife, and an irrepressible family, mostly girls, almond-eyed, dark, delightful young things, but of a most fiendish activity. They are chasing each other up and down the deck, when a bell rings.

"What's that for? Breakfast? Oh, jolly! Let's hunt up mamma." Mamma is discovered fast asleep in the saloon in a comfortable corner, with a pile of weekly fiction on her lap, is roused and dragged off, protesting loudly. They sit at the next table to ours, and, once fairly awake,

mamma attacks the breakfast with some resolution. But ever and again her plump soft little hands drop helplessly before her, and she turns her head in a soft appealing way towards us. "Oh, isn't this fatiguing?" With the young ones it is a sharp burst for ten minutes or so, trying everything, and freely commenting on any culinary novelty. Then there is a general cry, "Now, let's put mamma away, and have a jolly good game."

By the time breakfast is over we are at Kirn, a little harbour with yachts and pleasure-boats bobbing about in the swell of our wake, for otherwise there is hardly a ripple on the water; and here there is a grand exodus of fish-wives and of the local passengers generally. And here, perhaps, is one of the finest parts of this noble estuary; a grand reach like an inland sea, stretching to north, and south, and east, the meeting point of loch and firth, with a fine border of hills and distant peaks; and in a few minutes after leaving Kirn we arrive at Dunoon, with a church perched among the trees, and the fragments of a castle on the knoll beyond. We have turned the elbow of the river now, and are steaming nearly due south down the firth. All along the firth every eligible nook is occupied by a snug villa, and the richness, brightness, and movement of the whole scene on this bright and cheerful day is beyond all description. Presently here is Inellan, a green gem on the shore looking down from trees and green fields upon a neat pier, with boats, and yachts, and bustling steamers, and quiet white-winged ships filling in the scene, while over the long low headlands of Bute rise the clear-cut peaks of Arran, and a far shining distance of waters,

Where Cumray's isles with verdant link,
Close the fair entrance of the Clyde.

There is only one drawback to our enjoyment of the rich and varied scene. We go too fast—we would like to call out "Hold! stop! easy a bit; here is something we want to have a good look at," but the swift steamer seems to devour the distance. Lose your place for a minute, and you shut up the guide-book in despair. Well, let us enjoy a cigar, and let Mary Grant find out all the places, and tell us the history of them.

A marvellous thing when we leave Rothesay is to see the big steamer turn round, and leaving behind it the open channel, head directly for the mainland. We seem to be hopelessly entangled among

the hills, but point after point opens out, reach after reach, and we are fairly in the Kyles of Bute, the narrow strait which divides the island from the mainland. Long ranges of hills on one hand, with rocky islands in the channel, and rocky promontories that may turn out to be islands, a bewildering mixture of land and water, and then we touch at a sweet retired little place called Tighnabruaich, a pleasant Celtic name that rings sweetly in the ear with all kinds of suggestions of peace and seclusion. But there is no lingering at Tighnabruaich; everything goes at the utmost speed of steam. The big steamer is moored stem and stern to the tiny pier, and you can't help thinking that if by accident her engines made a start, she would carry off pier and village, and a good slice of the hillside, cruising away with her. Half-a-dozen stalwart fellows in blue run out the brow, passengers land and embark, and in as short a time as these words are written, the *Columba* is steaming on again, devouring the distance as before. We have rounded Ardlamont Point, we have left the Kyles of Bute, and now we are in Loch Fyne. You have heard of Loch Fyne herrings. Well, here they are in strings upon the floor of Tarbert Pier. Tarbert of Cantyre, this, and not to be confounded with the Tarbet of Loch Lomond, but each a narrow isthmus between two big lochs, and here on this rocky point outside Tarbert harbour, green with ferns, where sheep are cropping the scanty herbage, and fishermen in blue perched upon the rocks, here is a yellow coach waiting, and horses coming up, coach and horses ready to take any adventurous passengers to the western loch.

A transit somewhat famous in Scottish tradition, Mary Grant reminds us, teste Walter Scott again, who describes the passage of Robert Bruce on his return from exile to set up his standard in his own country.

Up Tarbat's western lake they bore
Then dragg'd their bark the isthmus o'er.

An earlier monarch of still more vague and traditionary hue also made the transit in a similar way. "When Magnus, the barefooted king of Norway, obtained from Donaldblane, of Scotland" — son of Shakespeare's Duncan surely — "the cession of the Western Isles, or all those places that could be surrounded in a boat, he added to them the peninsula of Cantyre by this fraud: he placed himself in the stern of the boat, held the rudder, was

drawn over this narrow track, and by this species of navigation wrested the country from his brother monarch."

But while Mary Grant was reading us this little history, we had lost all chance of emulating either Magnus or Robert, for Tarbert Pier was left behind; and the Columba swiftly heading up Loch Fyne soon comes to her moorings at Ardishaig Pier, a magnificent run of more than ninety miles, through rivers, firth, and loch. Now Ardishaig—putting the accent on the "dish" and not the "zig," if you please—Ardishaig is the Port Said of our isthmian transit, for here is the entrance to the Crinan canal, connecting Loch Fyne with the sound of Jura. The Crinan was no doubt intended for a ship canal, but as it was planned in the eighteenth century, when smacks and trading brigs were the only craft appearing in these waters, the accommodation for ships is limited, and we must quit the stately Columba for a much smaller craft.

First a hill has to be climbed, however; a scramble through the pleasant little fishing village, to where the Linnet, a little saloon steamer, is waiting to receive us.

Topmast and pennant glitter free
High raised above the greenwood tree.

At least, if the Linnet cannot boast a topmast she has a very satisfactory funnel, and the feeling of sitting on her deck, with the loch at our feet, and boats sailing off far below us, is novel and rather nice. Indeed, the run through the Crinan is charming, a quite pastoral interlude in this day of mountain and flood. The eye, a little fatigued with long vistas of glittering waters, with long-drawn lines of hills, and an ever-varying panorama of wide and extensive scope, now reposes on verdant thickets of ferns and wild flowers, through which the placid canal, clear and crystal-bright, winds peacefully. A water gallery, from which on one side you have a scene of sterile desolation and mountain wilds, while on the other branches of honeysuckle dangle over the boat, with sprigs of hawthorn and the bonnie wild rose.

And now we pass into a lock, a lock with a "k" if you please, and no Highland lake, but a solid English invention of the Brinsley and Bridgwater order, a lock with high walls, cool and shady. "Just like Teddington Lock," Jock's London friend observes. Shady and cool, with the sunny upper world looking down upon us in the form of a row of children, little bare-legged lassies who salute us as we rise gradually to the sunshine level with a continued

chorus, "Melk, melk, melk!" For each lassie has a can and a glass, and hopes to catch the eye of the thirsty tourist as he steps ashore. For here begins the pilgrimage of the nine locks, a break in the journey, affording a pleasant country stroll by the canal side while the steamer is getting up a staircase of locks, nine steps in a mile. It is a leisurely stroll through a wild secluded country, along which the canal has caused to spring up here and there little white cottages, with their kail-yards. The bare-legged lassies hang on the skirts of the party with their incessant cries of "Melk, melk!" And here there are tables spread in the wilderness, with white cloths and oat-cake and more "melk." Here one good wife to invite confidence has tethered her cow close by, while an enterprising tradesman has set up a little wooden entrepôt for tobacco, walking-sticks, and dry goods generally.

And now the sound of the pipes are heard in the distance as we approach the last of the locks, and over the level sward by the bank of the canal a piper is proudly strutting as

He screw'd the pipes and gart them skirl.

And here is spread the last of the tables in the wilderness with cake and "melk." Down below is the stony bed of a stream, and a little farmstead, white and comfortable-looking, while from a little nook in the crags that are sprinkled with a scanty verdure, a group of women, some with red tartan shawls about their heads, are watching the strange but accustomed scene. There is something appropriate, too, in the wild skirl of the pipes, something that harmonises with things around; if somebody would dance a reel now or a strathspey—can Jennie now?

Jennie turns up her nose at the suggestion, but the almond-eyed girls are equal to the occasion. But it is a fandango, I should say, something Spanish, Moorish, or what not, rather than Scotch, ending in a wild romp and much laughter, while the piper shakes his head disapprovingly.

Uncle Jock has not come up yet; he has stopped for a crack with some honest farmer's wife as broad as she is long, and Mary Grant is with him, and so I am thrown upon Jennie for companionship and sympathy. Not that I get much of the latter. That is all reserved for her precious Ronald, who is no doubt enjoying himself thoroughly and troubling himself little about her. But still the girl had a coaxing

way with her as if she wanted to get something out of me, and presently it came out. Would I so manage matters that we should spend a Sunday in Skye, so that Ronald and she might meet? Uncle Jock would be guided by me, but if Jennie ventured to propose such a thing, he would be sure to go dead against it. It was like her impudence to suggest such a thing. Was I to be a go-between in her love-affairs, when my heart was broken already with them. "Pooh!" said Jennie; "why, you're more in love with Mary Grant than you ever were with me; and I'll make a friend of her for your sake, and give you all kinds of chances with her, if you'll only do this for me." And on these terms this iniquitous compact was ratified.

By this time the steamer was in sight, and all the passengers were gathered at the lock-side. The piper was blowing his loudest, having made a satisfactory collection in his Highland bonnet, and the little girls with bare legs were still chanting their monotonous "Melk, melk!" with still greater assiduity as they saw their last chances of doing business escaping them. "Don't give the little things any money," said Jennie sagely; "it demoralises them. Just see that pretty little thing to whom you gave a penny for her pretty face; see her false smile and hard eager eyes as she searches people's faces for other possible pennies." And the last sight we had as we sank down, steamer and all, into the cool loch, was the row of little bare-legged traders all gathered on the brink, and still crying, "Melk, melk!" But, once we had fairly sunk out of reach, away they all went with a hop and a skip, chasing each other down the brae—all children again once more.

Away we go now, at full speed, twirling round the sharp corners with amazing dexterity on the part of the man at the wheel, who is much bothered, by the way, by the women's parasols—bright gaudy things—sticking up against the line of sight. "Was you please pit doon yon umbrelly?" is the coxswain's despairing cry; but the women take no notice of that, of course. Down below us is now a mossy waste, a sort of half-defunct loch, with a border of hills, and high over these is the peak of Ben Cruachan, at the furthest end of Loch Awe. Then there is a nice little white village by the canal, with a creek where a timber-barge from Glasgow is taking in a leisurely load. And this is the only sign of traffic we have seen along the

line of the canal except our own steamer, and the fourgons of passengers' baggage which are pounding along the road. Soon we are in sight of the sea, and of the red funnel of the steamer Iona that is waiting for us down below, but whistling and blowing off steam as if she meant to go without us if we didn't look sharp.

Now I hear Mary Grant descanting on the scenery as we steam out between Jura and the mainland. The Paps of Jura—three conical peaks—are in sight, and islands and mainland, and islands and mainland again, all mixed up, and not to be distinguished in this wonderful archipelago. But if they were the isles of the Hesperides, they would not keep me on deck when once the dinner-bell has rung, so ravenous does one get in the pure keen air. Else there is a whirlpool close by, a very maelstrom;

And Scarba's isle, whose tortured shore
Still rings to Corrieveken's roar.

But Corrieveken roars gently to-day—like nothing louder than the murmur of a sea-shell—though, on a stormy day, with the boisterous Atlantic tide rushing through the strait at the rate of eighteen miles an hour, and a sunken rock in the middle to intensify the tumult of waters, if the result is not exactly a whirlpool, it is something just as dangerous and uncanny.

When hunger is satisfied, and we are once more on deck, we find ourselves cruising about among low rocky islets almost awash with the sea. The Mare Islands are in sight to the westward—lone unvisited isles well suited for marvellous legends.

Presently we are among slate rocks and islets that are just the peaks of slate mountains rising sheer out of the waves, and here are quarries that are worked far under the sea, and fishermen sunning themselves like so many seals upon the rocks, with their little cobbles bobbing idly up and down on the clear green waters. And there in front of us are the dark ranges of Mull, and the land of Lorn is on our right, if we could make out mainland from islands.

And now the mountains are closing in all round, the rugged hills of Morven, with green Lismore in front, and the ridges of Appin in the background. Our German band strikes up "My Queen," and shutting my eyes I fancy myself approaching Hammer-smith Bridge on the voyage to Kew. But what a different prospect as we glide behind the island of Kerrera, into the

land-locked Bay of Oban, the bright little town that is climbing up the hillside, with the soft green of Dunolly woods, and the glassy harbour all astir with yachts and pleasure-boats! But everybody's concern now is to get together belongings, and get ashore, where on the steam-boat wharf an eager crowd is waiting our arrival. Hardly are we alongside when the gangway is run out by a crowd of officious touts, and the breath is almost taken away by their simultaneous roar of invitation. However, we have settled our destination beforehand, for a moment's indecision would perhaps result in the tourist's being dragged to pieces by rival touts; and the official porters wheel the heavy baggage off to the hotel, while the rest of us hurry off to the post-office.

Jennie has got her letter, I can see by the triumphant flash of her eye, and I have got as many as I want, and Uncle Jock has satisfied himself that the concern at St. Mary's Axe has not collapsed during his absence, and Mrs. Gillies has two or three epistles from old cronies who are keeping a vain and ineffectual watch upon her house and servants. And even Mary Grant has got one, who only left home this morning. What does she want with a letter? and indeed I eye it rather savagely, although it is no business of mine who writes to her. And Mary catches my eye and blushes a little. "It is from Archie," she explains, "with the latest news about the Vanderpumps," and the happy change in my countenance seems reflected in hers, as she laughs quietly over her letter.

"And I'm all for a quiet day to-morrow," says Uncle Jock, as he stretches his legs on a comfortable bench in front of the hotel; the dimpling bay in front of us all alive with boats going to and fro between yachts and shore; the low hills of Kerrera in a misty kind of shadow, while the sunshine glows on the lofty peaks of Mull. "A real quiet day, you know; breakfast not a minute before nine, and perhaps a boat in the bay with fishing-lines for a pretence, and plenty of tobacco and cool drinks." And how shall I break it to the poor man that I mean to drag him out of bed by six in the morning and start him for Skye by the boat that leaves at seven? I can't do it; and yet Jennie implores me—for to-morrow is Saturday, and Ronald has written to urge her by all loves to reach the island by Sunday. For it seems that he has met a rich uncle on the island—a man who trades about all over

the Western Isles—a bachelor and rather a hard nut. And Ronald thinks it of the greatest importance that Jennie should meet him; but he is going away on Monday, right away to the Shetlands or the Orkneys, and then good-bye to any hopes from that quarter. "And, oh," said Jennie, "I don't like all this hanging on to uncles, but what are poor young bodies to do?"

And so we sought out Mary Grant, and brought her into the plot. And Mary crept up to her uncle and told him how it had been the wish of her heart since childhood to visit Skye. "And so ye shall, lassie," said Uncle Jock. "Just talk it over with yon long-legged chiel, and ye shall plan it all out for us." And so we discovered that the only chance of getting to Skye was by starting on the following morning. To which Uncle Jock gave a growling, grumbling assent.

LOVE SONG.

ERE the lovely dream is broken, ere the glamour fades away,
Ere the tender mists of morning melt beneath the perfect day;
While yet around the shrine we kneel at, lingers the sweet rosy glow,
And the music keeps true measure; darling, let me go!

Though my foot shrinks back in terror, from the path that I must tread,
Where dim ghosts each step are haunting, and the cloud frowns overhead;
Though my hand clings wildly to it; the fond clasp whose strength I know,
Though my heart half breaks to say it; darling, let me go!

Aye, the true eyes look undaunted, down the future's devious way,
And the soul of faith is thrilling in each earnest word you say;
But the sad eye of experience sees beneath youth's radiant glow,
Slow and sure Time works his mission; darling, let me go!

Worse than all, aye, worse than parting, tho' the word knells like despair,
To watch the flower closely, fondly, and find the sign of canker there;
To read the first faint touch of languor; the first impatient chafe to know!
Ere you feel the chain you cherish; darling, let me go!

Dearest, truest, loved so fondly, loved with passion never told,
Better death itself than feeling, touch grow careless, tone ring cold,
While the light is fullest, freest, of the bliss I treasure so,
While my idol is mine only; darling, let me go!

Let me go, yet not forget me, all too weak to lose it quite,
It, the glory and the gladness, flooding every sense in light;
Love itself, in youth's sweet potency, scarce could firmer faith bestow,
Yet, just because I love so dearly; darling, let me go!

A SHORT FLIGHT INTO EGYPT.

IN TWO PARTS. PART I.

IT might almost be called a flight for life; but my steps were directed towards Alexandria, not away from it, a statement which at first seems strange and startling in the troubled days in which I am writing.

But when I took wing for the shores of the Nile, I was merely flying from the rigour of the memorably cold winter of 1879-80. I am one of those unfortunates to whom an exceptionally cold season does not by any means suggest the delights of skating, snow-balling, and generally increased jollity, but rather catarrhs, rheumatic twinges, bronchitis, and imprisonment to one room. So I had wandered through Italy, southwards, finding sharp frost at Rome, snow in the streets of Naples, and grey skies and white-capped mountains even in Sicily; where, in the month of December, 1879, a large wood-fire was almost as necessary as it would have been in Switzerland.

There was nothing for it but to fly from Europe altogether. Africa! the very word seemed to have a certain glow about it, and to give one an agreeable thrill like that caused by basking in actual sunshine.

Then this much be-travelled land of Egypt was to me still quite an unknown country, and I had the advantage—from my own point of view—of knowing little or nothing about it even from the innumerable books which have been devoted to the subject.

"There is no new thing under the sun," but there are always new eyes to look upon the old things, the oldest of which are perhaps the most interesting of all; and the impressions conveyed by one's own eyes and ears are certainly the freshest and pleasantest to receive. So I would not be "guided" or "conducted," whether personally or otherwise. I would set my face towards the Land of the Sun, and see what I should see.

What I did see there returns just now with a strange vividness to my mind. This I suppose is natural when our memories of things are blended with the knowledge that those things will be seen never more by anyone.

The City of Alexandria was so far Europeanised in its outward aspects, that when restored and rebuilt—as, of course, it will be—it may not be very unlike the Alexandria of two years and a half

ago; but Cairo, the most thoroughly representative oriental city remaining, in its outward aspects, the chief stronghold of all that is attractive to the purely artistic imagination in all that part of the world—Cairo, if, alas! she should be burnt and ravaged as Alexandria has been by the ruthless Egyptian soldiery, will assuredly arise no more in her former strange beauty. Her hundred graceful minarets; her ancient dwelling-houses with their arabesque carvings, priceless wood-work, and stained glass; all these things once reduced to ashes can never, never be replaced, while the possible fate of many of the peaceful inhabitants of those secluded dwellings fills the mind with tragic, and perhaps prophetic, pictures.

From these it is pleasanter to turn to my recollections of Alexandria and Cairo two years ago. Steaming out of the port of Messina one bright Friday morning in January, we cast anchor in the harbour of Alexandria on the following Tuesday morning. It was a source of much satisfaction to find that our arrival had been thus timed, for vessels can only enter the harbour by daylight; if they approach after sunset they are obliged to lay to until the next morning. No ship may enter without a pilot to take her through the difficult channels of the port, and when the weather is very rough, a vessel may be tossing outside for a day or two if no pilot chooses to go out to her, or if it is thought she draws too much water to allow of her passing over the principal shoal while the waves are running high.

One natural obstruction which it was said might easily have been removed—namely, a rock lying in the middle of the central channel—was jealously preserved by the Egyptian Government, under the idea that the difficulties of entering the port would act as safeguards against the attack of a hostile fleet. But this idea having been now somewhat sternly dispelled, it is to be hoped that, when Alexandria is once more open to the peaceful commerce of the world, this rock may be blown up, when, with a properly-arranged system of buoys, ships might enter and leave the port in safety either by day or night.

I have been much amused to read lately, especially in certain continental newspapers, the most glowing descriptions of the beauty of the Alexandrian shores, and to learn from similar sources that the town itself is the pearl of all the Mediterranean cities. Can it be that some English

cannon-balls, ploughing through the long low monotonous sand-banks which constitute the former, have lent some "enchantment to the view," which did not exist before? Or that Alexandria has really been transformed in two years into an eighth wonder of the world, comprising all the splendours of Paris with the mysterious interest of Damascus?

It certainly was not the case when I was there, and yet if nature and art have not combined to work absolute miracles since then, one is forced to the conclusion that these instructors of the public mind have drawn on their imagination, in default of real experience. It is odd, too, to observe how the accounts have varied with the momentary political bias of the writer, some declaring that Alexandria is an absolutely European city of unparalleled stateliness, and others affirming that it is a unique pearl of Orient. Those persons who have been there, know of course that it was neither; but exhibited a strange jostling of things Eastern and Western, which gave it a peculiar and sufficiently interesting character of its own. Interesting, that is to say, on account of its strangeness, but it cannot be denied that there was something jarring and vulgarising in the way in which European civilisation, as understood by Ismail Pasha, was forced into the midst of this motley population, in the form of stuccoed houses, French cafés, wide, monotonous, shadeless streets, and other European institutions, good, bad, and indifferent.

One civilisation may be grafted upon another; customs and ideas imported from other countries may, and often do, root themselves and flourish vigorously in their new home, and appear at last to have been the natural growth of the soil; but this must always be the result of time, or of certain strong affinities. But the ex-Khedive of Egypt thought to Frenchify, and so to beautify, his chief cities from one day to another, and the "civilisation," thus arbitrarily and abruptly introduced, had no more real value than a rootless flower stuck in a pot to simulate a growing plant.

My first glimpse of the African shore, with its pale gleaming sands, its low line of dazzlingly white buildings, and the sunshine and the dancing water all around, if not beautiful was certainly cheering. Here at least there would be no snow.

The voyage had been bitterly cold. It had been grand, as we sailed away from

Sicily, to get the view of Etna from the sea, but even while admiring the sight I had wished that the white mantle on his mighty shoulders did not hang quite so low, for it seemed to freeze the atmosphere for miles round; and again, passing the island of Candia two days later, we found all the higher hill-peaks hung with snow-clouds, and the lower slopes frosted over like a twelfth-cake; but here at last was sunshine.

I had heard among other things the often-repeated phrase, that Alexandria was entirely Europeanised, and had nothing of the oriental city left except the dirt.

Remarks like these would appear to spring from the careless exaggeration of people who do not observe for themselves. Some of the older and narrower streets, through which the hotel omnibus jolted you from the custom-house, were surely as un-European as possible, with their curious zig-zag upper storeys, projecting wedge-shaped over the street; their jealously-latticed harem windows; their veiled women and turbaned men; and what is, perhaps, most striking of all to a fresh European eye, the camel quietly pacing the streets as an ordinary beast of burden.

Even in the newer portions of the city, where the houses were high rectangular blocks of brick and stucco, with brightly-painted venetian-blinds, just like the houses in any new quarter of Brussels, or Paris, or Rome, and where London coats or Parisian bonnets abounded, still the turban and the yasmak were there side by side with them, as well as a dozen other picturesque and distinctive costumes of various nations, Persian, Indian, Bulgarian, Greek, making up a varied and brightly-coloured crowd the like of which I at least had certainly never seen in Europe.

Suddenly turning a street-corner, where the walls are all pasted over with advertisements of Madame Angot and Le Petit Duc, there comes an Arab funeral. First walks a company of old blind men, with beards as white as their turbans, chanting, or rather intoning, verses from the Koran; then follows a crowd of children performing also a sing-song kind of measure, but in a babbling irregular way. Then the bier, on which the corpse is borne in a deep oblong lidless box, covered with bright red silk, and gaudily ornamented, the turban of the deceased person being stuck on the top of a high wooden projection in front.

Behind the bier come the hired female

mourners in long dark-blue dresses, and thick black veils which only leave a horizontal slit for the eyes, the upper and lower parts being held together by a brass ornament just between the eyes; they utter a shrill monotonous cry at intervals, and flourish fragments of dark stuff which I suppose is meant to express, figuratively, wailing and rending of garments for the loss of the dear departed. They all hurry along at a great pace as if anxious to get it over. All certainly very un-European, and in strange sharp contrast with the "Billards" and the opera.

Then at the hotels, where, of course, one finds the usual black-coated waiters, talking in the usual polyglot manner, dark-visaged white-robed figures are gliding about among them, silently partaking in the service of the table; and finding no bell in your room, you are told to clap your hands when requiring attendance. This, I remember, I felt to be thoroughly and delightfully oriental.

I did not intend to stay long in Alexandria. I was only on my way to a city where I had been promised tepid airs even in January; so to Cairo I would go without delay.

Before leaving Alexandria, however, I took a couple of strolls about the town, to get a general idea of it.

The famous Great Square, or Place des Consuls, as it used to be called, I thought much over-rated and far from imposing. It was quite disproportionately long for its width, and looked, I thought, more like two or three scrubby second-rate squares put end to end, rather than one fine well-arranged space. The shops bordering it on either side were, with few exceptions, rather of the Islingtonian than the Regent Street order, and the trees small, burnt, and scrubby-looking. It was all very well, considering that it was Africa, but after being led to expect something like the Boulevard des Italiens and the Champs Elysées put together, was decidedly disappointing. The main, if not the sole, charm of it lay in the motley crowd which thronged it.

Having wandered right across the town towards the Eastern Harbour, or New Port, as it is called, I remember my attention being attracted by seeing people looking through the interstices in a wooden palisade, which enclosed a waste sandy space close to the sea. Hearing that the work going on inside was being directed in English, I went inside the gate with an

American fellow-traveller of mine, and the gentleman in authority proving to be a compatriot of his, we were politely invited to step forward and see for ourselves what was going on. We looked down into an immense trench, which had been cut around and partly under an enormous granite obelisk—that very "Cleopatra's Needle" which has since been set up so successfully at New York. I remember the gentleman in charge of the works telling us that the whole thing was going to be carried out in a new and superior manner, as he meant to carry away, not only the obelisk, but also the stones of the base on which it had stood, and to set them up in their old order in the New World. He told us that some of these stones had been found to be clamped together with iron in a certain way which no modern engineer appears to have been able to improve upon. I afterwards heard that coins and masonic emblems were found under the foundation-stones. Poor old obelisk! Its transplantation has not thriven with it. The same friend in whose company I first saw it being dug up for shipment to America wrote me lately that a few months of the variable Western clime, with its rains and frosts, had done more to "age" the monument than all the centuries which had passed over its granite head beneath the sun of Egypt. Already the surface had begun to scale and crack, and the hieroglyphics on one side had become almost undistinguishable.

I had been advised to take the evening rather than the morning train to Cairo, a table d'hôte neighbour telling me that it was somewhat quicker and that there was "absolutely nothing to be seen on the road," but I finally decided to make the journey, which only occupied six or seven hours, by daylight, and found no reason to regret my decision.

The country, it is true, was flat and uninteresting, but there were the inhabitants, both biped and quadruped, to be observed, and the flat landscape was, after all, the "Land of Egypt," seen for the first time, and those glistening waters which we kept crossing and recrossing were the waters of Old Nile.

The high road to Cairo from Alexandria runs parallel to the railway, and for a length of time so close as to permit minute observations of the passers-by. Here, therefore, there was plenty to interest and amuse me. Groups of people kept passing who looked as if they had come straight out of

an Illustrated Family Bible; shepherds, water-carriers, camel-drivers, etc., etc., all with flowing garments and free dignified mien. There is always an especial grace about the gait of people who are accustomed to walk barefoot and carry burdens on their heads, and the Egyptian peasantry, both male and female, possess this grace in a remarkable degree. Their dress certainly does not impede the free and natural movements of the body in any way, appearing to consist of a single loose cotton garment falling from the neck to the knees, or to the heels, according to the sex of the wearer, with a turban for the men and a veil for the women.

Here comes a group which looks as if composed for the canvas of one of the old masters. How easily and comfortably the woman, shrouded in her dark-blue draperies, and holding a young child in her arms, sits the small meek donkey which is being so carefully guided by that bearded and turbaned man. In all probability the man is her servant; an Egyptian husband of to-day would certainly be riding the donkey, letting his wife follow on foot with the baby.

Now passes a string of camels bearing great bales of merchandise; anon comes an important-looking personage clothed in silk and riding a good horse; his servant runs in front, and easily keeps pace with the animal's brisk trot.

Presently follow more camels, almost disappearing under their burden of freshly-cut sugar-canes, which take a waving undulating movement from the slow rocking step of the animals; and the next comer is a gigantic buffalo-bull, led by a tiny girl of some four or five years, to whose motion and voice the great clumsy-looking brute is perfectly obedient.

The great size of the cattle and camels grazing in the fields has almost the effect of an optical illusion as one looks across the level country; the diminutive donkeys—who, by the way, seem to have all the pluck, and do all the work—look no bigger than dogs beside them.

"An Arab village," exclaims a fellow-passenger, and I look in the direction indicated, but only see a group of tall date-palms and a small collection of mud-heaps at their feet. I think to myself that if that be a village at all it can only be a settlement of beavers—and there are no beavers in Egypt. But on approaching nearer I find that the distance, and the great height of the trees, have deceived my

eye, and that the mud-heaps are large enough to serve for human habitations, although apparently possessing no other qualification for that purpose.

The dark forms of women are seen passing in and out, and little brown naked children stop in their play to shake their hands menacingly at the passing train.

At all the small stations where the train stopped, hordes of these little creatures who could get anywhere within throwing distance stood and screamed for "back-sheesh" in a deafening manner, but those who were too far off to have any hope of a copper consoled themselves by cursing us all as Christians.

It was odd to observe at the wayside stations, groups of quite well-dressed persons sitting on the ground, or an outspread shawl or rug, while waiting for their train, looking quite composed and comfortable, where Europeans of the same class would have been wandering restlessly up and down, or leaning uncomfortably against posts in default of benches.

After passing Kalioob junction, which is the last station before the capital, the country becomes much prettier; little wooded tracts, interspersed with handsome villas and flowering gardens, form a most agreeable relief after the monotony of the muddy level plain, and the traveller feels as if an oft-recurring dream were at last realised, when the lofty slender minarets of the Mosque of Mohammed Ali on the citadel hill are seen cutting the sky towards the east, about the same time that one comes in view of the chain of the Lybian hills, stretching away to the west, behind the Pyramids.

The sense of familiarity with many of these strange and beautiful scenes, which I had while looking on them for the first time, would not probably be peculiar to me.

I had thought that I knew as little as possible about Egypt, and yet the first view of Cairo and the Pyramids seemed as familiar to me as possible. An idea of it all had been imbibed, without knowing it, from books and pictures. It was afterwards that the strangeness grew, and that one came to observe differences more than resemblances.

At Cairo, even before leaving the railway-station, I felt myself at once to be much farther from Europe, and more decidedly amidst an alien people, than the six hours' journey from Alexandria would seem to account for. One had immediately

a vivid sense of being a mere unit in the midst of a thoroughly Mussulman population, differing from, and generally antagonistic to, ourselves at almost every point.

The Arabs with whom I came most in contact afterwards, during a four months' residence in Cairo, were naturally those who depend chiefly for their livelihood on the advent of strangers and foreigners like myself. All these naturally show themselves extremely tolerant of the singularities and errors of the Nazarene, so long as the francs are in brisk circulation, but it was impossible not to have a distinct perception that they no more admired or desired to imitate our ways than we theirs.

They are sensible to kindness, however, and their gratitude is not entirely "a lively sense of benefits to come," for it was not at all uncommon to hear them speak of some one particular traveller whom they had served, but whom they could scarcely hope to see again, with the greatest regard and respect.

"Very good gentleman, Mr. So-and-so, very kind, always gave the Arab good words;" or, "Very nice lady, she always ask for my little sister; very nice lady, now I like to see that lady again."

I suppose it would be impossible for any human beings, who were not on terms of mortal enmity to begin with, to be thrown much together in mutual dependence without growing to like each other better. I have known of many tempting offers being made to Arab and Nubian servants by European travellers who had grown to rely thoroughly on the good service and kindly feeling of the former, and the Arabs who are thrown into close contact with Europeans, such as donkey-boys, shopkeepers, servants, seem to like them and get on well with them, although doubtless with the mass of the population a Christian is an object of scorn and dislike.

MY COUSIN ALICK.

A STORY.

THERE were three little girls living in the big old house at Clipstone, of which I was the eldest and the plainest. Our parents were well-to-do people, and owned the pretty old place in which we had all been born and brought up. When Cousin Alick came down to spend a month with us before going to India, I was just twelve years old, a slim, dark, quiet girl, old beyond my age in manner and feeling, and

very proud was I of his friendship for me and preference for my society. It was in the summer-time, and in the evenings I would often be sitting in the garden with my lesson-books while the elders were at dinner; and after mother had gone to the drawing-room, or to the nursery, and father had fallen asleep over his cigar, Alick would step out of the window and come over the lawn to me, the cloud on his brow—for he nearly always looked moody at that time, perhaps even what might be called sullen—lifted a little at the sight of my pleasure at seeing him, for I was dearly fond of this big cousin of mine.

He was very kind to me in spite of the evident weight on his spirits; he would sit by my side and help me with my lessons, explaining the hard words that I could not understand, and telling me many little things which I was not required to know, but which all helped to fix the subject in my mind. I think our governess must have been surprised at my rapid progress about this time; this I certainly know, that not one word of Cousin Alick's was ever forgotten by me—each one lives freshly in my memory to this day.

He was, as I have said, very gloomy and often absent-minded, and from inadvertent remarks dropped now and then by my parents in my hearing, I dimly understood that he was in trouble with his own family, and that was why he had come to stay at his uncle's until his ship sailed. He had just returned from Oxford, I knew, and there were whispers of debts, and of being "plucked"—whatever that might be—and I gathered that he was in disgrace with his father, our uncle, Alexander Blair, who was considered a stern and rigorous man. We children, Valerie and I—Nina was little more than a baby—stood in great awe of him, and I loved and pitied Alick only the more when I heard of these things. Our father had got him this post in India to which he was going out, but I don't think he had any great hopes of his nephew, for I heard him say to my mother one day that "Alick was a clever fellow enough, but there was not a bit of industry or application about him."

I remember him well as he was then, even though I have seen so much of him since, and he is so altered. He was twenty-one years old, a tall, dark, lean youth with a bare fallow face and resentful-looking black eyes. I suppose he was what would be called very "fresh" or "raw," but I was only a child, and I loved him dearly,

and thought him handsome, perfect, heroic. I know he was sulky and bad-tempered, but I think that was, in a great measure, the fault of his father, who snubbed and bullied the naturally high-spirited lad until all his good qualities were hidden under the bad passions which his severity brought uppermost.

During that time of his stay at our house I saw a great deal of my cousin. There was no other visitor, and he did not care for the society of children such as Valerie and Nina—they were too babyish, too full of noisy play, though Valerie was a beautiful child, just nine years old, fair and golden-haired, laughing and witching, admired by everyone except, perhaps, Alick, who was not one of an age to care for children, and who liked me because I was grave and old beyond my years, and could sympathise, in some degree, with his vague regrets and hopes. I loved my cousin in those days—words are powerless to tell how dearly! Even now, when I see him in the nobility of his perfect manhood, the hopes of his boyhood realised, the height of his aspirations attained, I still look back with yearning tenderness to the raw lad who taught me, all unconsciously, the meaning of the word “love.”

The day of his departure came at last. The dog-cart waited at the door, and father and he were all ready to start. Father was going to see him on board his ship—Uncle Alexander would not have anything to do with him, not even so much as to wish him good-bye.

Valerie had run away laughing, and hiding her face when mother told her to go and kiss Cousin Alick, for she would not see him again for a very long while, but he did not care for that—he was not thinking of her, little spoilt child.

He was very pale, I remember that, and when mother drew him aside in the hall and whispered in his ear, he flushed red, and then went paler than before. But he kissed mother again, and muttered something that sounded like, “I will try.”

He came to me then, and kissed me several times, very tenderly.

“Good-bye, dear little Ruth,” he said; “don’t forget Cousin Alick—he will not forget you.”

That was all he said, but it was treasured up in my childish heart, until those parting words of his were more real to me than all the others which were spoken to and around me every day of my life. I think he was sorry to leave

us, I think his lip was quivering a little as he ran down the steps and got into the dog-cart. Father drove, and as they turned out of the avenue into the road Alick looked back at the house, and seeing me still standing on the steps, kissed his hand to me, not lightly, smilingly, but with a very grave, and even sorrowful face. He was gone then, and I could not help shedding a few tears—I was only a child, after all. Valerie, who ran out of her hiding-place when she had made sure he was gone, finding me crying, laughed, and pulled my hair, and persecuted me in her pretty, teasing, charming way, but I could not bear it then. I went away from her upstairs, and shut myself in mother’s dressing-room, and cried until I had no more tears to shed.

The time passed on very quietly and evenly after Cousin Alick was gone. I was fully occupied with school-room duties, and Valerie ought to have been also, but no one could make her do more than she chose. She was—of her own accord—a little dunce, but such a beautiful bewitching dunce, no one knew how to find fault with her. We all loved her so dearly, we could not bear to scold her. My mother was very well satisfied with my attainments. I had good abilities, and had made use of them, but nothing could make me pretty, like our Valerie. I don’t think I was plain in those days. I was tall and slender, with dark hair and a pale face, and large grave dark eyes, but there was no brilliancy, no charm about me, such as my beautiful second sister possessed.

We heard little of Alick. He did not write very often, and when he did I did not see his letters, or know much of what they contained. There were great hardships and privations to be endured in his rough life out there, but father said they would do him good, and teach him what work was. I do not think he ever complained of them—dear Alick!

At seventeen I went to my first ball. Oh, how Valerie envied me! She stayed in my room all the while Simmons was dressing me, turning over my things and admiring them, and wishing she were in my place. I joined heartily in her wish, for I did not care to go. Mother said it was time I began to go into society, but I felt I should never care for it. Valerie could not understand me, she thought me so odd, and told me so, laughing and showing her little pearly teeth, while she stood by the toilet-table and tried on my bracelets, and fluttered my fan, and made believe she was

being asked to dance, and pleased herself with many a pretty pretence. Already, at fourteen, she was as tall as I, and very womanly-looking. Mother began to despair of keeping her in the school-room for three years longer, and yet it seemed necessary, she knew scarcely anything, and frankly admitted her ignorance. But she smiled so enchantingly over her confession, and spoke so sweetly, that people only laughed, and thought her the more charming.

I enjoyed that first ball of mine very well—better, indeed, than I had expected. I received a fair amount of attention, and had no lack of partners. Valerie was fast asleep in bed, of course, when we got home, but the next morning she waylaid Simmons as she was carrying a cup of tea to my room, and brought it in herself, in order to hear my adventures. I had not much to tell her about myself. I had met no handsome lover, no hero of romance, no one—though I did not say this aloud—to compare with the hero of my childhood, poor dear Cousin Alick. Valerie was rather disappointed at my commonplace experiences, but her lovely face flushed and glowed with interest as I described the glittering ball-room, the entrancing music, the lights, the brilliant crowds, the excitement of it all, which I knew she could appreciate so much better than I.

"How shall I wait three whole years?" she cried, clasping her hands together, and I smiled as I answered:

"Time enough yet, Valerie; and, who knows?—you are so tall and womanly for your years, you might not have to wait so long, perhaps, if only you would try to study a little more, dear."

She said she would really be more industrious, and promised to practise two hours every day—a promise broken almost as soon as uttered—if I would plead with mother for her, which I was very willing to do, for I knew her appearance would cause a sensation in our circle, and I thought that when mother had such a beautiful daughter to take about with her she would think less of me, and perhaps let me go back to the quiet home-life, which I always preferred. Our mother was most affectionate and devoted—a sweet woman, but ambitious, too, for her children, and I could see she wished me to marry well, though no such words were ever uttered in my presence. But I knew, too, that all my heart was taken up with my childhood's love, and I dreaded her natural

surprise at my indifference to the gaieties which are generally so fascinating to a young girl just out. She put it all down, however, to my natural quietness and reserve, and when I refused my first offer of marriage she was not angry, nor even vexed, though it was what the world would call a good one. She talked to me very kindly, sympathising with me, and telling me never to marry a man whom I could not love and honour. Dear mother! She could not tell that my heart was already occupied, and it was not for me to speak, but I hoped that at some time in the future she might know the truth through other lips. For he did care for me. We had been very fond of each other during that month of constant intercourse, and I think he was more grieved at the parting with me than with anyone else. Of course there was a wide difference between us. He was a man even then, if only a very young one, while I was a mere child. He might marry out there—it was as likely as not—but he had not done so as yet, and until that came to pass I would allow myself to love him with all the passion of my reserved nature.

Father had not much opinion of his doings. His letters were but few and short, and contained little news of himself, and father seemed to think his silence a bad sign, and that if he had anything good to tell of himself he would tell it. But when I was nineteen, Uncle Alexander died, leaving all his property to Alick, with a loving message of farewell and forgiveness, for he relented at the last. Cousin Alick wrote a long letter then to father and mother—the first of his that I ever saw—such a manly noble letter. I knew when I read it that I had not been mistaken in him—that he was well worth a woman's best love. It held such good news, too, of himself. He had been working so hard all these years, never stopping to take pleasure, working on to pay his debts and make himself quite independent of any of his relations, only he would not say a word until he had achieved his task; and now, just when Uncle Alexander's property came to him, he could stand entirely by himself, an independent man. But he did not slight his father's wealth—far from it. He was only glad to see how fully Uncle Alexander had forgiven him, and was comforted inexpressibly by his dying message. He spoke so kindly and regretfully of his father, as if he had never been harsh to him—as if

he had been as tender a father to him as my own was to me. I loved him a thousand times more dearly after reading his kind, sorrowful, manly words. Mother cried over them, and father coughed and got behind his newspaper, while I crept out into the garden to think. I had nothing to regret, as they had. I had never misjudged him, never believed him anything but good, and true, and honest. My heart was full of joy that summer morning.

After that we all began to expect him home. Now there was a home and a place for him in his own country, we did not see why he should stay out in India, spending his best years among strangers. He did not come, however, and when I attained my majority he was still absent.

Valerie was eighteen then—the loveliest girl in the county, everyone said, and a terrible coquette, though she never really meant to hurt anyone. I think mother expected great things for her, but if she had found me difficult to please, she now discovered that Valerie was a thousand times more so, for she had so many lovers to choose between, and I had but a few. High and low, rich and poor, eligible and ineligible, all flocked to my sister's feet, and laid their hearts down before her; not to be spurned in haughty disdain—that was not our Valerie's way—but to be smiled at, and coquetted with, and gently put aside with a few winning words that sent them away more madly in love with her than ever, and ready to forgive her anything.

But at last, when mother was trying to count up the number of lovers she had rejected, and was getting really vexed at her caprice, there came one who seemed to find favour even in her critical eyes. He was a young clergyman, named Carus Wyckham, well-connected, and in every way desirable, but we thought it a strange choice for our laughing bright-spirited Valerie to make. He was a young, grave man, with a serious fair face, and pale golden hair brushed away from his forehead in smooth shining waves. He was not handsome—not even good-looking—but there was something saintly, even angelic, in his face. He had a splendid voice, full and sonorous, like the richest deepest notes of an organ; and when he preached I used to think the beauty of his tones would have lent power and grandeur to the most commonplace sermon. But his sermons were not commonplace, for he was not a commonplace

man. They were like himself—deep, and grave, and tender, striking far into the hearts of the people.

I could not tell whether Valerie really loved him; she certainly liked and respected him—everyone did that—and his patience with her changing moods and his self-denying love for her were wonderful to behold. I think she tried him very much at times with her wilfulness and frivolity, but he soon began to gain an influence over her; she seemed to like to be with him; “it rested her,” she would say, smilingly, as they walked off to the garden to sit under the trees and read or talk. For they talked together a great deal, and he was beginning to teach her that there are higher and better things to live for than balls and garden-parties, dressing and coquetting. They were not to be married for two years, for she was only eighteen, and father and mother thought her too young to marry.

And all this time I had remained true to the secret love of bygone days, while my mother wondered and sometimes worried about me, and talked me over with my father. This I know, because on one occasion I heard him answer:

“Let her alone, my dear; there's time enough yet. Ruth will find her heart some day.”

We had one beautiful photograph of Cousin Alick, which he had sent to us soon after the death of his father. I could scarcely believe my eyes when I saw the change that the years had made in him. He left us a long, lean, moody-looking youth—here was a fine, broad-chested, handsome man, with a bold bronzed face, smiling brilliant eyes, and an air of dash and daring about him which fairly took my mother's heart by storm.

I could not take the photograph away, because it was not mine, and would have been missed, for mother was always showing “her nephew, Alick Blair,” to some one or other, but when they were all out of the way, and I thought myself safe, I used to steal into the drawing-room and turn over the pages of the album in which his picture was until I came to the beloved face, and there would my eyes dwell long and tenderly. But still he did not come home, and when I was twenty-two years old, mother sent me on a long visit to a widowed sister of hers in Ireland. It had been an old promise that one of us should go and stay with her at some time, and so, at last, the lot fell upon

me. Long afterwards I found out that mother had been writing to her about me, telling her that she did not know what to make of me, and my aunt had answered, asking to be allowed to have the charge of me for a time—she might be able to remove my apparent objection to marriage.

I stayed two months in Ireland. It was not a very happy time, though we saw a great deal of company, and went out every evening when we were not ourselves entertaining. She was a very masterful woman, with none of my mother's sweetness and winning ways to soften her character, and she set all her wits to work to force me into a marriage with a wealthy Irish gentleman who made me an offer during my stay. But I could not yield either to persuasions or commands, for I did not even like him, much less love him, and she was displeased with me, and I, of course, was unhappy. I think mother could not have thoroughly understood Aunt Celia's disposition, or she would not have sent me to stay with her, I feel sure. Just as I had made up my mind to write to her and tell her about it, and beg her to send for me to come home, I received one from her instead, telling me that Cousin Alick had arrived quite unexpectedly, and was staying at our house.

"You will like to see him," she wrote, "for, if I remember, you and he were great friends years ago. He is so altered, so much improved, we are all so pleased with him. If you can make up your mind to leave your aunt's gay circle, I should like you to return home at once. Alick is eager to see you, and I think he will be surprised at the alteration in you."

"Who is this Cousin Alick?" enquired my aunt, with a sharp look at me from under her brows when I showed her my mother's letter.

"He is father's nephew, Aunt Celia, and has been out in India since he was twenty-one."

"H'm! How long ago was that?"

"Just ten years—yes, he must be thirty-one now."

"Is he well off?"

"I believe so."

"H'm!" again, with another sharp glance at my changing face. "Well, perhaps you had better go, child."

I knew what was in her mind, and it made me ashamed, and yet my heart leaped high with joy at the thought of meeting him again. I wrote to my mother, telling her how glad I should be

to come home, but as my deliverance was near, I reserved the story of my troubles until I should see her. I said, of course, that I should be very pleased to meet Cousin Alick again, but no word of the heart-gladness which I really felt passed my lips, or rather my pen.

My letter was answered in a few days by my father in person, who came to pay a short visit to Aunt Celia as well as to fetch me home.

Oh, how intolerably long the time seemed to me—how that week dragged by—spent so pleasantly by my father in shooting expeditions and other excursions of pleasure with Aunt Celia's Irish friends. He knew I had wanted to come, but he had no idea of the fever of unrest which possessed me—he did not think that a week more or less could make any difference to me, while the precious time of Alick's stay was being wasted, and he might be returning to India soon for all I knew. And when he had smoked, and shot, and chatted one week away, he actually proposed staying another, and would certainly have carried out his intention had he not chanced to catch my eye at that moment, and seeing, I am afraid, some regretful expression therein, altered his mind.

"No, we'll go on Tuesday after all," he said kindly. "I forgot that my little Ruth here has not seen her mother for two months, and there's her cousin home from India, too. Yes, we'll go on Tuesday."

"What sort of young man is this nephew of yours?" enquired my aunt, just as sharply as she had questioned me.

"As fine a fellow as ever breathed," returned my father, and I knew that from him was high praise.

I am afraid my cheeks flushed with pleasure as I heard his warm commendation.

"Rich?" pursued my aunt. My father quite understood her ideas, and if he had not she would not have cared.

"Oh yes," he answered carelessly; "quite a nabob. He made a nice little fortune of his own out there, and has the whole of my brother's property as well."

"Ah!" ejaculated my aunt, looking satisfied.

And after that she did not press father to stay as much as a day longer.

Tuesday night we spent on the boat. I could not sleep, though I was very comfortable; I lay awake, thinking that the morrow would bring me face to face with my hero once more after ten long years of anticipation. How would he look? What would

he say? What would he think of me? Would he consider me improved, as my mother's letter had certainly implied? Would he have quite forgotten those days we spent together in the garden long ago, or would he remember—a little? These were the thoughts which chased one another through my brain all the night long; but when morning came I was not weary. I was too happy and excited for that.

It was a good distance to Ciipstone, and my father took the journey in his usual leisurely way, so that it was quite four o'clock in the afternoon before we reached our house.

Mother was in the drawing-room, with Nina. They said Valerie had been out in the garden ever since luncheon, and that Alick had gone a little while ago to find her. Mother was very pleased to have me back again, even though I had still proved obdurate; and she thought the change had done me good. No wonder, when my cheeks were so red—I could feel how they burned—and my eyes were so bright with eager looking forward. But she did not know that. Someone else had improved too during my absence. Nina was growing a most beautiful girl. She was seventeen now, and received a great deal of attention. She was not at all in Valerie's style, though quite as fair, with a clear pale skin and rich golden hair. But she was queenly, haughty—almost scornful to her many admirers, who served her as much in fear as in admiration. There were people who said that in another year of two she would quite eclipse her sister; but to me there was nobody in the world to compare with our laughing, witching, loving Valerie.

Mother had good reason to be proud of her two younger daughters, yet she never for one moment forgot me or slighted me, though I had certainly disappointed her in opposing her wishes so decidedly all these years. Oh, it was so good to meet her kindly smile, instead of Aunt Celia's sharp glances from beneath her brows—to hear her soft words of gentle guidance instead of Aunt Celia's stern commands!

Carus Wyckham came in while we were still in the first bustle of greeting. He said he had just half an hour to spare, so thought he would call in passing. And very glad was I to see him, even though my mind was full of other things. Carus and I were always good friends. We talked a few minutes longer, and when I had drunk a cup of tea, as I was not in

the least tired, my dear mother, knowing that he had called to see Valerie, and would be disappointed if he had to leave before she came in from the garden, proposed that he and I should go together, and take her and Alick by surprise.

"Very likely Alick won't know Ruth," she said smilingly, "and will wonder what strange lady Carus has brought with him."

So, after stealing a look into the glass to see if my hair was smooth, and—well—how I was looking altogether, I stepped out on to the lawn with Carus. That glance had satisfied me very well; I was looking my best, what with the unwonted colour in my cheeks and the sparkle in my eyes. Of course I could not compare with Valerie, but then no one expected that.

We crossed the lawn, Carus talking to me in his quiet brotherly fashion, with the sunlight falling on his uncovered head and irradiating his calm, grave face. There were times—generally when he was preaching or praying in church—when I had seen that quiet face lit up with an almost heavenly radiance; and though I sometimes speculated as to how he and Valerie would get on together in married life, with their different tastes and inclinations, I yet could not wonder at his power over her. There was something irresistible about this young grave man.

We went to the arbour, but they were not there, nor in the rose-garden or the hot-houses. Then Carus thought of the kitchen-garden. Valerie was fond of fruit, and he had sometimes found her there, eating strawberries or any fruit that happened to be in season, when he had searched all other places in vain. Of course Alick would willingly join her in such a raid, so thither we bent our steps.

To reach the kitchen-garden we had to pass a small but dense shrubbery, on the other side of which was a narrow path leading to the stables. As we went by we heard voices, and though we could not distinguish what was said, we recognised the owners directly—Valerie's soft accents only just audible, and a deep full voice, the sound of which made my heart beat fast and loud, for, though so much richer and more manly than when I heard it last, it was still the same voice which I had learnt to love ten years ago.

"There they are!" said Carus; "they must have been to the stables, then."

And turning aside, we entered upon the narrow path behind the shrubbery, and half-a-dozen steps brought us in full view

of Valerie and—her lover! Yes, lover—for his arms were folded about her, her head lay on his broad breast, and there they stood, all unconscious of observation, wholly wrapped up in their love!

Ah, what a face the sun shone upon—as dark as a Spaniard's, as noble as a king's—full of fire, and passion, and tenderness. My wildest dreams of my cousin Alick were more than realised when my eyes fell once more upon his splendid face, glowing with love for another than me.

"I ought not to have spoken," he was saying; "but I loved you so, Valerie—I loved you directly I saw you, and I thought sometimes that you—— My dearest, I ought to be the last in the world to teach you to be faithless, yet, if what you tell me is true, it would be a sin to marry him."

"Oh, yes, yes," she answered, and I never heard my sister's voice so moved before; "it is true, indeed. I never knew what it was to love until you came. It was reverence, respect, liking, that I felt for him—anything but love."

"My sweet! But there, I won't call you that—I will not touch your lips again—while you belong to another!"

I had heard enough—too much. This was how they met, then, who had parted without so much as a farewell! I turned to Carus with a face that—but I cannot tell how I looked, I only know how I felt, in that moment.

He took me by the hand and drew me gently away. We walked back in silence down the path we had come, and presently I raised my eyes to his face, scarcely conscious of my own pain in this first overwhelming blankness.

He looked stricken; there is no other word to describe what I read in his face in that one glance. He walked on mechanically, until we reached the little creeper-covered arbour where we had first sought them, and there we went in and sat down, still in silence. Carus leaned his arms upon the table, and after a little while his golden head stooped down upon them, until his face was hidden.

"Carus, Carus!" I cried at last, but he did not answer me.

"Carus," I wailed, "you are not alone; I am suffering too. For, if you loved her, I loved him! All these years I have loved him—and this is the end."

I could not have spoken so to any other person on earth, but Carus was not an ordinary man. He seemed so far above men's weaknesses and foibles, and yet was

so tender with all of them. He lifted his head at my sorrowful cry, and smiled on me with infinite compassion.

"Poor child!" he said. "And I was thinking only of myself! But I did not know, Ruth; how could I? Poor child!"

He laid his hand pityingly upon my head as I knelt beside the table, speaking gentle words of comfort and strength, putting aside all thought of his own grief to minister to my need.

"What shall we do?" I asked presently.

"There is nothing for you to do," he returned. "You must endure; it is I who must act, and yours is often the harder task; but that will be mine also, afterwards."

"Then you mean to——"

"I shall not see her again," he said quietly. "I shall write to her, and give her that which she craves—her freedom. My best beloved," he continued, speaking as if momentarily unconscious of my presence, "did you think I would for one moment withhold aught that might conduce to your happiness, your welfare? Heaven forbid it."

His face was rapt, a light as if from another world beaming upon it. He looked down at me again, and returned to my sorrows.

"Poor child!" he said once more. "It is hard now, both for you and for me; but we know to whom to go in our sorrow."

"Were they—were they much together?"

I asked after a pause.

"I do not know. If they were I did not notice it. I never thought——"

He broke off, and I took up his words with some bitterness.

"No, you never thought she could be false to you, that he would steal your best treasure."

"Don't, Ruth," he interposed with gentle firmness; "don't blame her, or him. They loved each other, they were made for each other; what wonder he spoke when he saw that his love was returned. Mine was the mistake, to think I might ever—— I would not have it otherwise; it would have been, as he said, a sin for her to marry me, loving him."

He spoke so calmly, so firmly, but looking at his face as he raised his grave blue eyes to the summer sky for one moment, I felt that he had received his death-blow. I broke down into bitter weeping, until he laid his hand upon my head again. That tender touch, as of benediction, stopped my violent sobs, laid my passion to sleep with its soothing power. He paused a moment,

standing by my side, and then stooped down to speak in my ear :

"Say unto happiness, 'I can do without thee;' with self-renunciation life begins."

I did not speak, I could not. The solemn words opened up to me such a noble life of self-forgetfulness. Was such a one as I able to walk in it? Could I take up my cross and go on my way with a smiling face, living for others alone, trampling bravely upon this poor wounded shrinking self? But he would, I knew, and I could but try. It did seem strange, though, and just at first a little cruel, that my beautiful sister, with her many conquests, must needs fix upon the one man whom I loved. Still, he might never have loved me; I had no real reason to think he would have done so even if he had never seen Valerie; it was only my foolish imagination after all.

And all Carus's devotion, all his patience and tenderness, were as nothing compared to Alick's love. Well, I could not blame her, seeing that I loved him myself.

"Ruth," he continued, "we must separate now, perhaps never to meet again in this world. But we shall never forget this hour. We have been linked together in sorrow; let us look forward to a joyful meeting in the glorious future that awaits us, where grief and trial are unknown. Good-bye, dear Ruth; may God bless and comfort you."

He pressed my hand, and left me.

Alick and Valerie have been married ten years now. I kept my secret well, and no one has ever guessed the reason of my determination to remain single. It was hard at first; my life seemed very bare and desolate, stripped of its love, but time brought comfort, and every day brings me nearer to my rest. I never saw anyone else for whom I could care, and I could not marry without true love; so here I am, an old maid, and my best affection is lavished on their eldest boy Alick, such a fine bright lad, and really fond of his auntie, too.

Valerie is a sweet woman, her husband has just the qualities which she needs to supplement her own, and their union is indeed blessed. I think she grows every day more like her mother—our dear mother, who has slept beneath the turf

these six years. I live near them, and see them and their children constantly, sometimes two or three times in a day. Alick often comes in to give me advice about my plants and grapes; such a fine noble-looking man he is. I wish his father could see him now, with his half-dozen children tumbling and laughing around him, and scrambling to walk next to "faver." We are capital friends, he and I, and when he sometimes teases me about my determined old-maidenism, he never guesses that the faded woman who smiles so calmly at his sallies gave up all other love for the love of him. That is all put aside now, cast out of my life long ago, and the love which I might not feel for him is given to his children.

Six months after Carus Wyckham bade me farewell in the little harbour at Clipstone I heard of his death, from fever caught during his ministrations to the fever-stricken in a poor London district. I knew he was glad to go; death would come to him as a welcome visitor. I did not sorrow for him, for I saw his heart was broken on the day when he found my sister Valerie in Alick's arms. But I went to my desk and took out the letter he wrote to her, which she showed to me, and which I kept. Such a noble letter it was. She never guessed what he suffered; he let her think him cold, pre-occupied, anything, rather than give her pain for his sake. And in accordance with his implied wish, I did not tell her the truth, I did not tell her his heart was broken, and I even kept the news of his death from her, lest she should think her inconstancy in any degree hastened it. For I knew he would wish it so.

She has forgotten him now, forgotten all else in the love of her husband and children; but I, sitting alone by the hearth, often think of him, and in the fire-light I sometimes see his face as I saw it on that day in the garden when we parted for the last time.

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